

**Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century**

by Michael J. Anthony

(Book Review)

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## Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century

### **Introduction**

As Kevin E. Lawson observes, the primary objective of Christian education is to encourage individuals to establish a steady relationship with God to lead holistic lives. Christian education also assists people to develop good interpersonal interactions within their communities and fostering cooperation through increased understanding of biblical teachings. However, the changing societal values and attitudes during the twentieth century have necessitated a re-evaluation of the message in Christian education. The book “Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century” edited and co-authored by Michael J. Anthony is a comprehensive response to the emerging challenges to Christian education during the twenty-first century. The summa consists of works by leading scholars such as Dennis Williams, Jonathan Thigpen, Richard Leyda, Klaus Issler, James Riley Estep Jr., and Kevin Lawson among others who have made considerable contributions towards Christian pedagogy.

The editor and contributing authors offer detailed insights into Christian education in the contemporary United States and provide submissions through the perspectives of changing cultures, biblical metanarratives, and Scripture. The book consists of thirty-one chapters that are divided into six sections that focus on common thematic areas. The first section of the book focuses on the historical, philosophical, theological, evangelism and discipleship, and cross-cultural perspectives in Christian education foundations. The second addresses developmental issues that range from the life span development aspects to spiritual formation, while the third section focuses on the pedagogic implications of Christian education. The third section discusses learning theory, teaching-learning process, and learning styles as well as the Holy Spirit and Jesus as a teacher. The fourth section presents organization models applied in Christian

education as well as the legal and ethical concerns in Christian ministry while the fifth section addresses the application of Christian education in families. The final section of the book is on specialized ministries such as counselling, recovery, and home schooling among others. In effect, this paper offer a book review on “Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century” and analyses how it addresses some of the issues in contemporary Christian pedagogy.

## **Book Review**

### **First Section**

Lawson’s chapter traces the history of Christian education from Biblical times and its transformations through time into the twentieth century. Initially, Christian pedagogy was informal and taught in homes before scribes assumed the responsibility of interpreting and teaching the Torah after the Exile for many years. One of the most important points raised by Lawson is that Jesus introduced new teaching approaches that enhanced his followers’ comprehension of the Scripture. Another critical issue noted by Lawson, in his submission, is the decline of educational institutions in the church due to increasing institutionalism and subservience to church hierarchy due to widespread illiteracy. The advent of the printing press, as the author observes, played a significant role in facilitating reforms in Christian education from the fifteenth century as information became increasingly available. However, Lawson acknowledges that drastic societal and technological changes, such as industrialization and the Internet, continue to create new challenges as well as opportunities in Christian education. For instance, Lawson concludes by observing the rise of focused educational ministry areas.

On his part, Warren Benson contends that biblical theology is the basis of systematic theology that establishes the philosophical foundations applied in Christian pedagogy. Warren’s

observation that theological studies are integral in enhancing the comprehension of Christian education as the author's assertion that the biblical principles are true, transcultural, relevant, and contemporary is vital to the Christian educators. Furthermore, the suggestion that Christian pedagogy should focus on encouraging learners to use theology in guiding their thinking is on point because it facilitates holistic transformation among the students pursuing Christian education. As Klaus Issler avers, theological understanding is crucial in comprehending life issues, developing a Christ-like nature, and becoming divinely ordained. Thus, having the Holy Spirit is vital in establishing a relationship with God and redeeming humanity in addition to providing the gifts that assist Christian educators in performing their work. Consequently, Christian education curricula should include Holy Spirit-mentored and interactive-community focused elements.

The book also provides a detailed assessment of the challenges that arise from multiculturalism and changing demographics in the United States. Breckenridge aptly points out that cross-cultural concerns arise due to interactions between individuals from diverse backgrounds and the inadvertent exclusion of some demographic groups from the church. Root argues that marginalization of various groups leads to severe consequences in the church and on Christian pedagogy. Moreover, Breckenridge rightly points out that people from different backgrounds have varied attitudes, values, and experiences. Nonetheless, the author also notes that educational ministries can inform and change attitudes among individuals because it enhances socialization processes and interactions among different subcultures. Breckenridge offers insightful recommendations on how educational instruction can address the issue of multiculturalism in the church. For instance, the author suggests the adoption of diverse

pedagogical approaches and learning styles for their students, careful understanding of abstract concepts, and evaluating educational methodology based on the students' ethnic heritage.

## **Second Section**

The second section focuses on developmental issues and begins by discussing the life span development that encompasses all the transformations that occur throughout an individual's lifetime. Pullman's chapter highlights the importance of human development theories in understanding the nature of interactions among people. Such theories are essential to Christian educators, especially in culturally diversified institutions, because they offer an approach of understanding social problems from different perspectives and sustain harmony among people with diverse backgrounds. Some of the theories discussed include intellectual-ethical, cognitive, social learning, and psychodynamic theories. The author correctly observes that none of the identified theories is enough to explain the diverse issues and needs of people, and this necessitates the adoption of multi-theoretical approaches in addressing the challenges in Christian education. Decision-making processes and the reasoning that informs them are of utmost importance to stakeholders in the Christian education systems due to the nature of questions that must be factored in moral decisions.

Different societies hold various beliefs and opinions considered morally acceptable or wrong, and this can affect their approaches to Christian pedagogy. Estep Jr. and Kuest's chapter discusses some of the moral development models as well as the perceptions of Christian educators towards such theories. One of the most significant suggestions offered by Estep Jr. and Kuest is the need for Christian educators to glean insights from social sciences and Scripture with the authors arguing that this helps in enhancing their comprehension of moral development and moral decision-making processes as well as improving the effectiveness of local ministries.

One of the premises of the faith development theory is that everyone has faith that offers meaning to their experiences while also attracting people to deeper commitment and understanding. Faith is a central tenet in the development of Christianity, and it calls for unquestionable trust and loyalty to God. The analysis of James W. Fowler's faith development theory by Dirks is comprehensive and addresses crucial issues related to faith in the twenty-first century, especially the competing worldviews of the concept. Dirks poignantly asserts that faith development among Christians effectively occurs in situations where believers engage in various aspects of church life. The suggestion is important because it concisely highlights the importance of unity among believers in contemporary Christian ministry characterized by multiculturalism and affected by internal disagreements. Faith development and spiritual formation are almost synonymous concepts that add meaning to each other.

Nick Taylor's chapter offers a compelling discussion on the issue of spiritual formation and its significance among the Christians using biblical references. As Matthew 5:48 states, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Christians can only achieve the perfection indicated in the verse through spiritual maturity. The author's argument that spiritual formation is a dynamic and ongoing process that occurs throughout an individual's lifespan is important because it implies that people always have new things to learn to enhance their spirituality. Moreover, Taylor points out the need for Christian educators must assist others in achieving spiritual transformations to ensure unity in Christ.

### **Third Section**

After providing detailed insights into the historical background of Christian education and the holistic development among individuals, Michael Anthony's book delves into the epistemological significance of Christian education. Yount begins the third section of the book

by presenting various learning theories broadly categorized as humanistic, cognitive, and behavioural for application by Christian educators. I concur with the author's suggestion that teaching should entail assisting the learners' in merging their convictions, meaningful understandings, and skilful behaviours. Moreover, effective Christian education requires teachers to apply different learning theories based on existing educational situations or needs. As noted previously, the contemporary Christian education occurs in challenging environments due to various factors that include cultural dissimilarities and changing societal attitudes among others. Christian educators applying the learning theories discussed by Yount can also refer to Jesus Christ who also faced unprecedented challenges and resistance from authorities during his teaching activities. In his submission, Pazmino aptly suggests that contemporary Christian educators should refer to the persons, content, and context of Jesus' teachings because it helps in revitalizing their perspectives in current settings.

Ward's chapter attempts to offer insights into the existing connection between learning and teaching as well as some of the strategies of improving the outcomes of the teaching-learning processes. The author contends that understanding how learning occurs as well as the role of teachers and learners is crucial in enhancing teaching and learning outcomes. Additionally, Ward observes the increasing significant changes in the learning environments throughout the world, and teachers should continually seek new learning experiences to remain relevant in contemporary Christian epistemology. Newton warns educators against undermining the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian pedagogy process. As John 14:26 states, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you things, bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." The verse asserts the importance of the Holy Spirit in guiding Christian education. Moreover, Newton insists that comprehending the breadth and

depth of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the pedagogy will encourage the educators in engaging Him in all learning processes.

While Yount presented various learning theories that can be applied in Christian pedagogy, LeFever's chapter focuses on the learning styles adopted by different students in Christian classrooms. The author argues that respecting students' favoured learning styles increases their appreciation of Christian education and strengthens their discipleship. The most significant assertion in LeFever's submission is the point that students approach learning differently despite being in the same educational settings. Cunningham suggests that Christian educators should adopt creative strategies while teaching in response to the rapidly changing learning environments as well as the diversified students' needs. The author argues that developing teacher-learner relationships and enhancing commitment can assist educators in delivering their pedagogic content creatively. The book describes some of the considerations and methods that educators can apply to improve their creativity while teaching as well as some of the barriers to creative pedagogy.

#### **Fourth Section**

The learning theories and styles cannot succeed without proper leadership, administration, and organization in institutions offering Christian education. The fourth section focuses on explaining various organizational models as well as administrative and leadership issues that could affect the successful implementation of Christian pedagogy. The Bible has countless references to the issues of leadership, organization, and administration, which form a crucial component in Christian education. As Cannister points out, the Bible mandates believers to manage resources faithfully and responsibly, and the organizational management function is critical to educational ministry. The author contends that organization is essential in ensuring that



people focus their efforts towards meeting their objectives. Cannister's chapter also discusses various organizational models applicable in Christian ministry. One of the interesting discussions in "Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century" is the complexities of leadership and education in small churches.

Simpson suggests that the misconception that small churches are miniatures of the larger establishments is among the leading causes of conflicts and ineffectiveness in leadership as well as education in such institutions. Instead, the author points out that small churches have unique features that distinguish them from larger churches. Thus, Simpson advises Christian educators to appreciate the uniqueness of the small congregations and avoid approaching their management as large churches. The administration and operation of all organizations, including the churches and Christian schools, require the identification and recruitment of individuals motivated towards achieving specific goals. Williams asserts that the Bible contains several passages that compel believers to train and equip more people with knowledge in God's commands and advance the Christian ministry. The author also highlights some of the challenges encountered during the recruitment of volunteers in Christian ministry and proposes the adoption of the recruitment strategy used by financial planners to overcome the identified problems. Williams accurately observes that many church ministries fail due to their failures to train volunteers. Training is essential because the positions in churches and church ministries have diversified requirements, and the volunteers must understand their responsibilities to perform maximally. Williams also highlights the necessity of motivating the volunteers in their work to avoid disruptions in the Christian ministry.

Gorman focuses on the significance of small groups in religious institutions and points out the increasing number of individuals joining small groups across the United States. By

understanding the reasons why people join small groups, Gorman asserts that churches can succeed in adapting to the changing environments and enhance their relations with their congregations. The author also encourages church leaders to adopt servant leadership to enable them to be attentive and meet the needs of their followers. The fourth section of the book ends with a focus on ethical and legal issues that affect church education as presented by Garland. Despite the commitment of churches to promote Christianity and spread the gospel to nonbelievers, Garland acknowledges that legal and ethical issues will always remain inevitable in church ministries. As such, the author advises church leaders to acquaint themselves with the law and seek regular updates that would assist them in preventing liability risks.

### **Fifth Section**

Section five of “Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century” focus on undoubtedly the most important social institution, the family. Elshof’s chapter begins by acknowledging the importance of the home in facilitating family life education anchored by a strong commitment to God and supported by biblical theology. The author observes that parents have a crucial role in educating, training, and guiding their children’s spiritual growth through choices and daily routines in the families. Elshof notes that the church also helps in modelling healthy church families and provides biblical backgrounds to assist the reader in comprehending the themes for family life. Additionally, the author summarizes the trends in family life that have occurred during the last six decades to create an understanding of some of the contemporary problems affecting family life education. The author maintains that church ministries must break the cycle of dysfunctional families through various interventions such as family enrichment and corrective counselling among others.

Children are vital members of the community and church family, but they increasingly face neglect due to the misplaced priorities from their parents in modern times. In referring to Genesis 1:28, Anthony accurately observes that children are an integral component in God's design because they ensure humankind's continuity. The Old and New Testaments have several other references to children and their importance to society. Anthony notes with serious concern the significant increase in family conflicts, single-parenting, blended families, child abuse and neglect, and dereliction of parental duties during the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, understanding the age-specific characteristics of the children can help in appreciating their unique needs and preventing conflicts with the children. As Anthony suggests, the changes in children ministry require Christian educators to assume the roles of disciples and faith modellers to raise a generation of faithful hearts. After discussing childhood education, Anthony's book then shifts its focus to the youth who constitute the most complex component of contemporary society due to the unpredictability of adolescent development. All church educators know that teenagers are most likely to be influenced by changing trends in their communities, and this, in turn, affects the success of youth ministry.

Rahn, in his submission, proposes the adoption of sociological methods and person-centric approaches that factor in the impact of peer influence and changing needs among teenagers to enhance the effectiveness of youth ministries. The author rightly points out that planning around issues that the youth consider essential and applying strategies such as teen-friendly or youth-targeted worship models and disciple-making are crucial to realigning the youths' focus on Christian education. While the youths are preoccupied with current issues, the adult population is concerned with future events and uncertainties. As Davis puts it, adults are also interested in gaining some meaning and satisfaction from their accrued experiences in

addition to making themselves available to meet their offspring's' needs. The author contends that the primary objective of adult ministries is to transform the lives and minds of the adult population and guide them to spiritual maturity. Davis identifies some of the models used by various churches in their adult ministries, and the author rightly acknowledges that each approach has inherent strengths and weaknesses. In effect, Davis provides significant insights into some of the principles that guide adult ministry for the rapidly expanding demographic group.

Ministering to multi-generational audiences is understandably a significant challenge to contemporary Christian educators due to the varied preferences, attitudes, and opinions of such congregants. Nonetheless, the educators and church ministers can reach out to their audiences effectively by acknowledging and understanding such differences in the different demographic categories. Black presents a revealing discussion on the generational perspectives that aims at delineating the distinguishing features and tendencies of the identified generations in the twenty-first century. Although the author acknowledges that the characterizations of the various generations have limitations, Black's observation of the inherent differences among the identified age sets is crucial in modern Christian ministry.

## **Sixth Section**

Section six of provides insights into some of the most critical specialized ministries in the church in modern times. An increasing number of Christian families are dysfunctional due to inadequate social support to assist them in coping with their changing socioeconomic environments, which necessitates interventions, such as counselling and Christian ministry. Welch's submission affirms the necessity of the counselling ministry in contemporary societies due to the troubles affecting families and their corresponding impacts on individuals. The author

appropriately points out that biblical principles should be the foundation of Christian counselling instead of applying secular theories. Welch rightly observes that Christian counsellors should make the church a refuge where troubled individuals find psychological healing and spiritual wholeness, and this requires them to expand their understanding of Christian education.

Anthony's chapter focuses on the issue of single adulthood that continues to increase throughout the United States and other developed nations. Anthony presents a biblical perspective of single adulthood, and the author interestingly points out the Scripture does not identify single adulthood as a punishment. The author further discusses some of the perceived benefits of single adulthood. Additionally, Anthony insists on the need to evaluate the intricacies of single adults to identify the appropriate programs for specific single adult groups.

Leyda's chapter discusses the significance of camping experience in Christian education. The author suggests that Christian camping is essential because it helps in facilitating maturity in Christ among the attendants through enhanced discipline. Leyda highlights some of the benefits of Christian camping and encourages Christian educators to establish innovative camping approaches that meet the needs of specific target audiences. Leyda provides a detailed assessment of the philosophy associated with Christian camping and highlights some considerations for creative Christian camping. The chapter also identifies some of the challenges and opportunities available in Christian camping. One of the most significant observations presented by Leyda is that Christian camping creates many teachable moments to all the participants.

Gaffney's chapter, on the recovery ministries, primarily focuses on rehabilitative efforts to individuals affected by various issues that complicate their lives. The Bible contains several references and metanarratives that are relevant to the issue of recovery, and Gaffney discusses

some of the passages in the Bible to support his submission on the topic. Recovery ministries are vital to diverse categories of individuals, and the author discusses programs or recovery interventions used in contemporary settings. I consider the author's recommendations for support groups relevant to modern Christian educators because the primary objective of recovery ministry is to help in alleviating the suffering of afflicted persons. Failure to consider such guidelines may aggravate the suffering rather than bring the affected persons closer to Christianity.

Letterman's chapter delves into the condition of public education in America and offers insights into some of the concerns raised against the system. The author also presents discussions on home schooling and Christian pedagogy that are considered as the most viable alternatives to the public education systems. Regardless of the environment or curricula that parents enrol their children in, Letterman insists on students undergoing teachings that flourish them in God's ways. The last chapter by Jonathan Thigpen focuses on the parachurch movements, which plays crucial roles in Christian evangelism, although they rarely receive significant attention from the mainstream media. Thigpen provides a background of the parachurch movement and different parachurch categories available in the United States and closes by evaluating some of the challenges facing the parachurch institutions.

### **Critical Assessment**

Overall, the book is well-formatted in thematic sections containing different chapters that make it easy to read. The book is divided into six sections that contain chapters or articles that cover common thematic areas. Each of the chapters consists of an introduction, biblical context or background, and discussion of models and theories. The chapters also offer in on the applications of contemporary Christian education. One of the crucial features of Michael J.

Anthony's book is that the authors extensively use scholarly sources and biblical texts in their references to support their assertions. The summa contains submissions by prominent scholars in Christian education from different institutions, and this makes the presented information authoritative and reliable for contemporary Christian educators. Moreover, the book is comprehensive and attempts to address almost all the pertinent issues affecting contemporary Christian education, including the legal and ethical aspects. As such, I consider the book a reliable source in Christian pedagogy and a must-read both for the educators, parents, and students alike.

### **Application of the Book**

The primary purpose of Christian education is to motivate individuals to establish lasting relationships with God and lead fulfilling lives as well as enhancing the interpersonal interactions with other community members. Nonetheless, Anthony's book highlights the need to reassess Christian education due to the changes in societal values and attitudes that have occurred during the last century. The book is also informative and well-planned as the editor divided the book into different thematic areas to enable the reader to focus on topics of interest. As a lecturer and elder in the Presbyterian Church, I consider the book a useful resource because it has enhanced my understanding of the strategies that can assist me in implementing Christian education in my church. I would also recommend the book to my students because it offers comprehensive information on the issues affecting the successful effectuation of Christian pedagogy as well as the approaches that can help in overcoming the identified barriers.

### **Conclusion**

The primary objective of Christian education is to encourage people to have dependable relationships with God and lead holistic lives in addition to fostering cooperation within

communities. The changing societal values and attitudes have created a new need to reevaluate Christian pedagogy, and Michael Anthony's "Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century" attempts to address some of the challenges that face contemporary pedagogy. The book consists of contributions by leading scholars in Christian education, and each chapter provides historical background as well as biblical narratives or verses to support the authors' assertions. The book is comprehensive and attempts to address all the crucial issues affecting contemporary Christian pedagogy, and the authors offer insightful recommendations on how to overcome the identified challenges.



## Reference

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